

Northampton Policing Review Commission Alternatives to Policing Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, February 10, 2021

7:30-9:30pm

Remote meeting

1. Call to Order

Meeting is called to order by Booker. Booker, Carol, and Javier are present. Booker noted the planned absence of Alex, and that he would be joining later.

Minutes are approved with no changes.

2a. Public Comment

Comment from Hildagard Freedman

Comment from Wendy Foxman

Comment from Ya-Ping

Comment from Robert Eastman

2b. Javier opened the floor to commissioners to begin to discuss structuring the final recommendations while awaiting Alex to join at 8pm.

Carol shared a document with instructions which covers how to show things with a strong argument. Booker noted that a component is how to organize and do it. Carol said that the preliminary report read as choppy because there were so many authors and little time for editing. She felt very strongly about the policy brief which gives you the summary and the rationale, as well as where we have been. She wanted to discuss who does what.

Javier passed the chair to Booker to lead the questions to the chief. Booker briefed Alex on what had happened. All commissioners were ready to begin.

3: Guest speaker: Jody Kasper

Booker welcomed the chief and said he would read the questions submitted ahead of time, and then open the floor to more questions.

The first question is “How does the current dispatch system inform what kind of police presence is necessary for an incident?”

Jody responds that dispatch is a separate department and building and they have their own dispatch administrator. Different calls require different numbers of officers, depending on the call. Dispatchers try to ascertain the kind of danger on the other end of the line.

Booker asks about how mental health is triaged and what are the implications for who gets sent. He references that the chief in prior public record said it's about 1 in 5 calls.

Jody says that dispatch has frequent callers who the dispatchers recognize and may just listen to the person. Or if they seem a little off, dispatchers may direct them to clinical support options. Other incidents may generate a police response.

Alex asks about how sometimes dispatch would send an ambulance and then an officer? How does the relationship work there.

Jody says dispatch will send folks almost at the same time. If the ambulance can respond it will. If it is not safe, they will wait for officers to respond and say its safe. If an ambulance gets there first and say it's ok, the police can be redirected before they arrive.

Javier asks for confirmation that the ambulance arrives and says its all set, then the police response may be cancelled.

Jody affirms this.

Javier asks how it's sorted out in terms of order, including ambulances and police calls.

Jody says that logistically one department gets the call first based on how radios work, but they get dispatched almost simultaneously. In a medical call most times both departments are called. Police arrive first in most cases because they're out in the community and ambulances are stationed at the fire department.

Carol asks about wellness checks for people with mental illnesses.

Jody says that wellness checks are not commonly done for mental illnesses. Its mostly concern for someone who received meals on wheels but is not taking the food. Dispatch tries to triage and police supervisors may also call off officers if they do not think it requires a police presence.

Booker asks whether dispatch will need to be retrained to direct calls appropriately and whether they get enough information.

Jody confirms that dispatch would need retraining in how to triage calls. She references Dever's STAR program. Jody also corrects herself and says that the 20% call volume. The only way to track call volume is to hand count them. They counted 3 months and in June it was 135, July was 137 and August was 200. Around 60% of those have safety concerns.

Alex asks how many calls the department received in 2019.

Jody says it was 35,000 calls and the percents are only 4-6% of calls during those months.

Alex says they are considering other areas, such as substance use and houseless folks for alternative responses.

Jody says that the police aren't called on someone for just being unhoused. But they have calls that involve unhoused people, but there's no way to count that.

Booker says that the chief has already answered some of the prepared questions, but that he will read them aloud anyway. The questions were to describe the current process for dealing with mental-health related calls, and what are the responses available now. The third question was that Jody has said one in five calls have a mental health and safety component where an officer would need to be present. An additional part of the question is to describe the approach and presentation, the number of vehicles, lights, and sirens in the call. And what are the risks you are assessing and how is force used.

Javier says he has had his hand up for a while and asks his question. Javier reiterates that the police have to hand count information, and asks why it isn't counted automatically. And second how many of the people with mental health calls end up arrested or in jail.

Jody says that it's easy to put data into their system IMC, but its hard to get the data out. She's asked for it, but they don't have a fix. Jody says they only rarely arrest someone on a mental health calls, but they do have about 100 section 12s.

Booker asks Jody to confirm what a section 12 is.

Jody confirms its a document that allows someone to be taken into medical custody and taken to the hospital for evaluation.

Carol and Booker gives their experiences with section 12. Carol comments that her practice professionally she now asks all responders to stand back and tries to convince the person to seek help voluntarily. She then asks whether the police would be open to a responder model for those calls.

Jody responds that officers do not want to be the ones to make section 12 calls and would welcome clinicians or other responders to make those calls.

Booker mentions Rachel Bromberg's presentation on the new responder program in Toronto, and asks what Jody's feelings on that type of response are.

Jody says she is fully on board with having alternative mental health responses. She thinks its a long time coming and wishes she could have brought it to the city sooner. It has a price tag but

it's important to have the discussions. She likes the reliance on 911, and having clinicians that can respond to scenes. CSO is too busy to respond to scenes. She didn't know enough about peer responders to speak on it more.

Alex brought up how few safety concerns there were in a survey of alternate responders to police. But dispatch has done the triage work already. He asks if she has any thoughts about the statistics being 60% compared to 3% or if it's a reporting difference.

Jody says she only knows about this community. She said it seems like there's not an interest by clinicians around responding to calls where people are throwing things, etc... and maybe over time there would be more comfort going to scenes. But now officers ask clinicians and many clinicians will just meet them at the hospital. A different type of person might apply for different jobs.

Carol suggests that the people who would apply for a new unit would not be the type of clinicians that she teaches who to do clinical work. They would be who were motivated to respond and do this kind of work.

Jody says that the DART program confirms that too, that people who have lived experienced work well with people struggling with addiction.

Booker skips questions and asks the chief to follow up with more about the DART program and examples of successes.

Jody explains how the DART program works with the police who knew who were at high risk and understood addiction as a public safety issue would work within the community. The program grew to include recovery coaches. Then DART was able to pullback outreach. Now they provide overdose information to the health department.

Javier asks about the information provided in call logs, and whether the man-hours document the police provide, and what the difference is between those numbers and the hand-counted numbers.

Josy says that a person with a mental health crisis could come in as any call type and then be lost. They do have a call type called medical mental health, but they are not necessarily all counted in that.

Javier asks what Jody thinks about having peer responses to mental health.

Jody says she can't speak to this because she hasn't researched mental health peer responders.

Booker says it seems like she has good experience with harm reduction peer responses.

Jody says that they are not part of her department, and it's just the qualitative feedback she's heard.

Booker asks Jody to describe the process for handling domestic violence describe the current process for dealing with domestic violence calls. What does the state mandate in regard to these calls? Explain mandatory arrest policies and mandatory mandated reporter requirements. How do you determine if police intervention was the success? What agencies do you partner with?

Jody says they have a long and full policy. She says the policy includes instruction for what to do if it's a couple arguing, when you need multiple officers. And that it's very high stress. Officers collect stories, take evidence, determine who the aggressor is. Officers are told at the academy they should be making arrests if there was physical violence. And then if there are children in the home to bring in Department of Children and Families. It could take up to 2-3 hours if an arrest is made.

Booker asks when they engage other treaters, such as Safe Passage.

Jody says that she only gave the preferred response. But there is a mandatory arrest if there's a violation of a restraining order. If it's during non-business hours they connect a victim to the Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP) to connect them to resources. They only provide an initial connection.

Carol asks if the DVIP are trained peers or are employees of the police department.

Jody says the victim advocates get involved which can provide follow up care as well. DV advocates are grant funded through Belchertown and other communities. DVIP are only called at night and the civilian advocates get brought in.

Alex says he has done a lot of research on this topic and it's hard to suggest alternatives to it because the violence is still a crime. But it's also that 50% of abuse victims do not report it because of fears of the response of the system, especially when DCF might be involved. He asks if she has any comments.

Jody says victims can call victim advocates without giving their name and ask questions. And that there are still hurdles. While there are resources there are many people who do not report.

Javier asks how many U Visa certification the department has given.

Jody says they have only done one in 2019. They haven't turned anyone away, but it's not a common request.

Booker asks Javier to explain what that is.

Javier explains that the U Visa is for someone who is the victim of domestic violence, among other things, that would allow them to apply for a residency status.

Booker discusses the difficulty of balancing the need to report domestic violence, but also respecting wishes of people who do not want to report. He then asks where the police are with partnering with programs. During 8-5, what does the police do?

Jody says that during the day when the courthouse is open they are a resource. So during the day they can go there. During the day is when people get the most support because everything is open.

Booker then says he's heading for training questions and asks if there are officers who have additional training in working with domestic violence victims. And if there are officers who had additional training in terms of mental health referrals.

Jody says yes, there are officers with additional training. A sergeant that's trained and overseas all DV cases as well as detectives have training in family violence. For mental health the goal is to have 100% of the staff training in mental health first aid. But whenever there is turnover they need to have retraining. That training is basic and provided by BHN. The CIT is more comprehensive. They have 50% trained in CIT and it's not a recommendation to have 100% CIT trained officers. They're meant to be specialists.

Booker moves to the question of working with individuals who are unhoused. The questions are How extensive are calls and police responses to situations involving unhoused people; when are officers dispatched; what are the concerns and typical action; what are the referrals and resolutions?

Jody says they do not have a special category so they cannot list that mention. Some people list addresses as Streets of Northampton if they are entered in the system. But otherwise there is no way to collect that. They do occasionally get calls for unhoused folks it's cold, or about tents and encampments if they are surrounded by trash, needles, or human excrement. If they get a call about that they have a flow chart with Ted Keller and notifies the mayor's office, and then they reach out to what used to be Eliot Homeless Services. Sometimes they are asked to clean up their space or are asked to move and give them notice to move. Some cases they are not moved. If there are needles, the health department will provide a sharps container.

Carol asks whether Jody can remember calls about unhoused community members based on their behaviors, such as public urination.

Jody responds that they get calls like they get calls for anyone else. If someone is publicly urinating they are publicly urinating. It's noise complaints, and they got a stabbing report. There's no difference in the calls just because someone is living in a tent. There is an officer that works on the overnight shift who works and gives information resources to them. There are many reasons someone would rather live in a tent.

Booker asks for other questions, then explains that many of the comments they get are around unhoused people and how complex the interactions are with the police, but can't articulate a data-driven question.

Jody says she understands because there are complications. For housed people they can drink alcohol in their homes, or have an argument, and you can't do that in a tent. People are very exposed. She does not give her staff specific guidance in how to deal with these.

Booker asks Jody to describe their staffing levels, and what is the rationale behind them; what response times are aimed for, and is that accomplished, and what is required under state and federal law?

Jody says there are 60 full-time officers. 14 of those are administrative including the chief, two captains, and all the lieutenants and sergeants. 6 are detectives, and 40 patrol officer positions. On average 6-7 are not positions are working including academy training, field training, or medical injuries. She has about 33 officers on staff. This allows for 7-8 officers per shift and then they lose officers to training and time off. They try to do training as part of a work day. They do look at response times, but do not look at it minute by minute. There is no set expectation communicated to officers. Large accidents could take an entire shift. If another call came in officers would have to be pulled off that, or would have to call for mutual aid or for state police.

Alex asks what is required by state or federal law in regards to staffing levels.

Jody is not aware of any state or federal laws that apply to staffing levels.

Booker announces that has it's now 4 minutes over, and asks the subcommittee whether they would like to continue.

Carol says she would like to hear, at some point, about the C4RJ and what the relationship is. Alex and Javier agree to let the question stand.

Jody responds that she went to a workshop put on by C4RJ and that they did good work in the Eastern part of the state. When she came back she couldn't find a local equivalent that was willing to take on this kind of work. But there was renewed interest in 2020. The police involvement is turning over all cases to the outside agency. She doesn't understand the concern with the police involvement since the police are the ones who know about the problem. There is no data on how well it works since today is the first case where it might be used.

Alex asks if the officers are involved in the circles.

Jody says they are only part of it if they are the victims.

Carol asks about whether a complainant can bring up their treatment by treatment by police, and whether that would be part of the process.

Jody says no, it's only for crimes.

Javier says that the site for C4RJ is heavily cop-centered. What is that police bring to the table.

Jody says she would be open to anything. She worked but could not find another organization willing to take it on. She is open to reassessing and does not even know if C4RJ would want to stay in the area after things are off the ground.

Booker says that how he understands it, it would be good to have police never be involved. Though it sounds like the police have minimal involvement.

Jody says you can't have a totally stand alone restorative justice program. She can't think of another way of doing restorative justice without police involvement doing the referrals to the next outside organization.

Alex says that officers in many other countries are not armed by default, and asks the chief could discuss it and say why an armed response is a good response here?

Jody says she's gone to other countries, and those countries do not have a lot of firearms. They have a lot of knife injuries but does not have a lot of firearms. There are a lot of firearms here, and other weapons, where officers have been threatened and could lose their lives. She doesn't know how we can ask officers to go on calls that are dangerous without a gun. There are some calls that you could look at that may not warrant a weapon. Even calls like suspicious persons could be dangerous. She references an officer getting hit in the head with a hammer. She doesn't know how that would look in our community.

Alex says that one recommendation from the Brattleboro report is to not have officers armed at community events. He references the community block party, and that encountering armed people can induce fear.

Jody says officers must have their weapons because they do not know what would happen. The officers are on-call and patrol officers are there, but they could be called to something else and therefore would need access to their weapons.

Booker asks for a moment to debrief. Booker was most concerned about the comment about the lack of safety correspondents may feel, and Carol was commenting on the type of training they would need.

Carol says she heard willingness to consider different kinds of calls.

Booker asks Alex how he felt about the response to the numbers for staffing. Alex says he has a good understanding and that the community will have to decide about appropriate staffing levels. Any kind of alternative will help reduce the need for an armed response.

Javier says he is reassured, and that it's encouraging that Jody called the dispatch exceptional. There is a lot of good training that needs to happen, and that's something we know. But that specifically we want people to have a high level of training.

Carol says she's concerned about the ability to run reports and not count things by hand. She doesn't know how much it costs, but it's important to be able to run reports and understand the data and have it on hand.

Alex thinks the response of 50% of people who don't report really speaks to the lack of resources available to them, partly because people may be mandated reporters. And that creating safe places deserves attention.

Booker is the least certain in the response to domestic violence. He thought he understood it and no longer does. He also doesn't feel confident about what he felt about restorative justice, and would like to spend time on it based on the responses tonight.

Carol says she isn't clear about how the model the C4RJ works. Carol knows of pre and post adjudication, but wants to know more.

Booker brings up the idea that the models he read involve cases they have never gone to the police. For example neighbors hear an argument and decide to call a restorative justice program to intervene instead of calling the police.

Javier brings up the fact that many undocumented people do not call the police because of their fears around their immigration status. He also says that 70% of cahoots workers are people with lived experience.

4. Discussion and edit: Final report to the policing commission.

Booker would like to invite David Hoose to bring up ideas around unarmed traffic control, and whether he would do that with the alternatives subcommittee. Alex says they should only have 1 speaker or topic per meeting and have a chance to work on writing. Carol says she would second that, and finds it disturbing that the police are engaged in a cycle of arming up. Javier is ok with this as well, and would welcome having joint meetings or having commissioners speak.

Alex asks that Carol shares her document for writing with the commission. Alex says he wants the document to be a single report and not a combination of 3 reports.

Booker asks for a motion to adjourn. Javier gives the motion, Alex seconds, and Carol thirds. The meeting is adjourned.